

HABS No. IA-186

Kalbach and Son
Iowa Penn Central Regional Shopping Center
(Kalbach Lumber Company)

SW corner South B Street and First Avenue West
Oskaloosa
Mahaska County
Iowa

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

I. KALBACH & SON (KALBACH LUMBER COMPANY)

Location: Southwest corner of south "B" Street and First Avenue, West, Oskaloosa, Mahaska County, Iowa.

Present Owner Occupant and Use: Kalbach Lumber Company (to be demolished Fall 1984)

Statement of Significance: Kalbach Lumber Company is significant to the history of Oskaloosa's growth and development as the first lumber company in Oskaloosa. The original office on the corner of Second Avenue West and south "B" Street is believed to be the only remaining commercial building of frame construction from the early settlement period in Oskaloosa.¹

The building, on the corner of First Avenue West and South "B" Street, which was constructed in 1902, also possesses some architectural significance with its long rectangular design and clerestory windows in the two-story lumber shed.

The Kalbach Lumber Company was included in an Iowa Site Inventory and was indicated as a key structure, possibly eligible for the National Register by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

Historical Narrative: The Kalbach Lumber Company was founded in 1864 by Isaac Kalbach under the name of Kalbach and Son. Isaac Kalbach was born in Womelsderff, Berks County, Pennsylvania, November 13, 1822. When Kalbach was eleven years old, his father died, leaving his mother to care for the family. Until he was 21 years of age, Kalbach contributed his labor to the support of his family. For 3 years, he served as an apprentice, learning the cabinet maker's trade.²

In 1843, Isaac Kalbach married Christine Koch. On April 1, 1849, the Kalbachs and their three children left their home in Port Carbon, Pennsylvania to join a caravan that was moving west. The caravan travelled through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and several cities and towns in Illinois. In 1850, the Kalbachs and their company, stopped in Muscatine, Iowa, for the winter.

Isaac Kalbach worked at his trade of cabinet making in Muscatine until December, 1850, when he travelled on foot to Fort Dodge, Iowa to work on the government fort being built. On his way to Fort Dodge, he passed through Oskaloosa. Kalbach must have been impressed by the small, but growing, settlement of Oskaloosa, because when his work on the fort was completed in 1851, he returned to his home in Muscatine and immediately began preparations to move to Oskaloosa.³ The Kalbachs arrived in Oskaloosa on May 13, 1851, permanently settling in the city. Kalbach began by making furniture and doing various tasks that were necessary around the city. He immediately took place in the happenings of the city.

Mr. Kalbach was chosen to be the first city marshall and was appointed for 3 consecutive years; he served as a city councilman in 1862. He also became secretary of the school board when the city erected its first schoolhouse. Mr. Kalbach quickly became a prominent and well respected citizen of Oskaloosa.⁴

Mr. Kalbach became involved with building structures around town, including his own home. At that time, one could not buy lumber in Oskaloosa and it had to be hewn and cut from native timber, which consisted of hard woods. Because of the difficulty of working with this hard lumber, Mr. Kalbach decided to import soft pine lumber from towns on the Mississippi. Kalbach was not the only person who wanted soft timber and when his first load was received, it was quickly used and other consignments were demanded until he found himself retailing the valuable pieces of timber. As a result of the lumber demand, the lumber firm was initiated.⁵ In 1864, Kalbach founded the first lumber yard in Oskaloosa due to the demand for essential materials and tools for this growing community. The population was steadily growing in Mahaska County from 14,816 in the 1860 census to 22,178 in the 1870 census and, as a result, development abounded.

John A. Kalbach was born in 1844 in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. He travelled west with his parents in 1849 and arrived in Oskaloosa in 1851 at the age of seven. He was 23 years old in 1867, when he entered into the partnership with his father. John Kalbach held the office of city councilman in 1873 and was elected county supervisor, October 8, 1878. A souvenir book of Oskaloosa published by the Times Company in 1896 referred to John A. Kalbach as one of Oskaloosa's most respected and prosperous citizens and closely identifies him with the city's growth and prosperity.⁶

The lumber firm's first location was at the corner of South Market Street and Second Avenue East, where the present City Hall is located. It is thought that the business began in a rented livery stable and later the owners built their own office on this site. Mr. Kalbach's business flourished and he began to buy property in town, west of the square. In 1865, Kalbach purchased the southeast quarter of the block at the intersection by Second Avenue West and South "B" Street and moved his office there in December of 1870.

The new location for the office was at the southeast corner of the lot. The building was 16 feet by 36 feet in plan and was simple one-story, balloon frame structure with a horizontal drop (tongue and groove) siding exterior. The front facade extended above the roof line to be used as a sign, advertising their business (see HABS photo IA-186-4). To the north of the original office is a saw shed, assumed to be built at the same time. Although the interior structural system was changed to allow for a larger open space, this building has continually been used as a saw shed. A frame building with a gently sloping pitched roof, the saw shed is 50 feet by 50 feet with a 64 by 50 foot open lumber storage directly to the west.

I. Kalbach & Son began to purchase land adjacent to the office to provide more room for their business. In 1889 Kalbach purchased the lot north of the lumber yard on First Avenue and "B" Street and used it to store piles of lumber. Around the same time they purchased the southwest quarter of the block at the intersection of Second Avenue and "C" Street to use for more storage. Storage sheds were built west of the office with vertical board siding. The shed form a U-shaped around an interior lumber yard. The frame structures were closed off on the street side and open to the interior lumber yard (see HABS photo IA-186-5). The first shed was 72 feet by 16 feet. The storage shed furthest west was 86 feet by 16 feet and connects into a stable (32 feet by 16 feet) that originally was used to house the Kalbach's mules and delivery wagon. The stable had two large sliding wood doors to facilitate exit and entry of the mules and storage above the stalls for hay, feed, and mule harnesses. At one time, the stable had windows facing the street. North of the stable is another storage shed, 22 feet by 16 feet.

Closing off the U-shape, facing away from the alley, is a 116 foot by 18 foot storage shed. The father and son partnership lasted until 1893, when the senior Kalbach resigned. John Kalbach was joined by his brother George and the business adopted the name John A. and George Kalbach Lumber. At the age of 30, George joined the Kalbach Lumber business. George was born in Oskaloosa and graduated from the local high school in 1880.

The Kalbach Lumber business prospered over the years and in 1902, John A. and George Kalbach expanded their business and erected a new two-story lumber shed and office at the southwest corner of First Avenue West and South "B" Street. This building, in its original design, was 60 feet by 120 feet and was of particular note because of its long rectangular style design with clerestory windows along both sides, below the projecting roof, for interior lighting. This was a typical design for lumber sheds of this period because of its practicality. This design with a three tiered interior, sloping roof and clerestory windows, which could be opened, was advantageous in several ways.

It allowed for office and retail space below with two levels of storage above it. The design created an air convection to keep the lumber in storage dry and the air fresh. When open, the clerestory windows let hot air out. The long clerestory windows provided natural sunlight in an age when electricity did not exist. The design also enabled wagons to pull inside the center area of the shed to load supplies (see HABS photo IA-186-6).

The construction method was balloon frame (uprights run from the base of the building to the eaves, and the horizontal members are nailed to them) with 1-half inch by 6-inch , red cedar clapboard siding on the front facade, and 1-half inch by 8-inch tongue and groove siding on the sides and rear of the structure. The roof of the building is pitched and the front facade is symmetrical with a center projecting roof that has the look of a pediment above the roof level. A small cornice with a crown molding completes the front facade of the building. A few years later, to the west of the two-story building, an adjoining one-story storage shed was built in the same style. It had small windows, and in the middle of the building was a drive-in door.

The office and main entrance to the building were located at the northeast corner of the two-story building. Patrons walked into the office and up to the long oak counter for service.

The present firm, name of Kalbach Lumber Company, was established in 1906, when Warren Kalbach, John's son, obtained an interest in the business. Warren Kalbach was born in Oskaloosa in 1874 and became an active and prominent citizen. He had a reputation for being considerate and helpful to Oskaloosa families. In World War II, he served as president of the Oskaloosa Chamber of Commerce and was head of all the local war activities.⁷ Isaac Kalbach, the founder, died in 1910 and in 1911 John Kalbach died; ownership was then limited to George and Warren Kalbach. In 1945, Warren died and his interest passes to his son Huber Kalbach, who became actively engaged in the business. Huber Kalbach became the sole owner of the business in 1948 when his uncle, George Kalbach, died after 77 years with the firm.

At the turn of the century, as the firm continued to grow, the company purchased the lots west of their two-story lumber shed on First Avenue to be used as a warehouse. They expanded their warehouse and other property again in 1950, purchasing the south 54 feet of the northwest corner lot on "C" Street. In 1960, a major remodeling and modernization took place at Kalbach Lumber Company. The east drive-in door in the long lumber shed was enlarged and the windows above were blocked. The windows to the west of this drive-in door were also closed and blocked. The west one-story addition was modernized with plate-glass widows that were installed form the west drive-in door to the east edge of the building. The interior of this building was remodeled to include a hardware sales area.

Also in 1960, the original siding on the front of the main buildings was removed and replaced with new 1-half inch by 8-inch red cedar siding. This new siding was also placed on two-thirds of the east side of the two-story lumber shed and on the east side of the saw shed (see HABS photo IA-186-2 and 3). On the front facade of the main building, roof-like canopies were added above the drive-in door and above the windows on either side of the door, running horizontally from the east edge of the building to the west drive-in door.

The over sized keystone, above the Kalbach Lumber Yard sign, was removed and the clerestory windows were replaced with non-movable fiberglass paneling. In 1973, Huber Kalbach died, leaving ownership in the corporation to his heirs, Margaret, his wife, Charles H., and Daniel W., his sons, and Mary Kalbach Newsom, his daughter. That ownership presently exists. Daniel W. Kalbach moved to Oskaloosa to take over operation of the firm in 1966 upon completion of his military service and has remained in that capacity since that time.

In 1974, the second series of alterations took place. The west drive-in door was closed off to create more interior space for the hardware sales area. The roof-like canopy was extended all the way to the west edge of the building on the front facade (see HABS photo IA-186-1). The office was moved at this time from its location in the clerestory building to the one-story building to the west of this structure. This combined the office and hardware sales area into one location for convenience. In 1980, the hardware sales area was again expanded, but there were no external changes. In 1981, a new and larger warehouse replaced the old warehouse on South "C" Street. The new warehouse is of pole-bar construction with steel siding. All of the additions and expansions that took place over the years demonstrate the prosperity and growth of the business.

Project Information:

Plans call for demolition of the Kalbach Lumber Company in the Fall of 1984. This historical documentation of the Kalbach Lumber Company was completed by Urban Programming Corporation during May, June and July of 1984. It is one portion of the historical/architectural recordation of the Kalbach Lumber Company prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) that also includes photodocumentation and measured site plan of the complex. The recordation conforms with the Secretary of the Interior's standards for architectural documentation.

This documentation was completed under the direction of Gregory D. Kendrick, Historian for the United States Department of the Interior. Project Supervisor was Peter Sortino of Urban Programming Corporation. Historic documentation was completed by Diane Bowman of Urban Programming Corporation. The photographer for the project was David W. Preston, of St. Louis, Missouri. The detailed site plan of Kalbach Lumber Company was completed by Urban Programming Corporation draftsmen, Gary Hulsey and James Bogler.

Sources of Information:

Primary sources were employed when available. Reliable secondary sources and interview with knowledgeable local citizens were also utilized in the compilation of this historical documentation.

Two interviews were held with Daniel W. Kalbach, partial owner and current manager of Kalbach Lumber Company. Mr. Kalbach is the great-great-grandson of Isaac Kalbach, founder of the company. Interviews were held at the Penn Central Mall Office in Oskaloosa on May 22, 1984 and June 13, 1984. Photographs and other valuable information were also obtained from Daniel Kalbach.

Original and Subsequent Owners:

Reference to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands is in the County Auditor's Office, Mahaska County Courthouse, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

Lot 1

1850 - Deed, July 3, 1850, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. Commissioners of Mahaska County to Pultney Longhridge.

1868 - Deed, November 11, 1868, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. Pultney Longhridge to Caroline Hetcher.

1889 - Deed, November 13, 1889, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. E.M. Booth, executor to Isaac and John Kalbach.

1893 - Deed, undivided one-half interest, November 18, 1893, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. Isaac Kalbach and wife to George Kalbach.

1906 - Deed, February 3, 1906, recorded in Volume A-2, page 91. John A. Kalbach, et al to Kalbach Lumber Company.

1911 - Deed, April 17, 1911, recorded in Volume A-2, page 91. Edward Berth, executor, C. Fletcher estate to Kalbach Lumber Company.

Lot 2

1864 - Deed, March 19, 1864, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. John M. Longhridge to Catherine Cowles.

1879 - Deed, December 24, 1879, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100 Catherine Cowles by Sheriff to Elizabeth Hanson.

1879 - Quit claim Deed, December 24, 1879, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. Elizabeth Hanson to Catherine cowles.

1882 - Deed, May 23, 1882, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. Catherine and J.M. Woods to L.A. Smith.

1893 - Deed, July 31, 189, recorded in Volume A-1, page 100. L.A. Smith to J.M. Kinley and D.E. Smith.

1901 - Quit claim Deed, April 22, 1901, recorded in Volume A-2, page 91. A.G. Smith, et al to John McKinley.

1904 - Deed, August 6, 1904, recorded in Volume A-2, page 91. John Mckinley to John A. and George A. Kalbach.

1906 - Deed, February 3, 1906, recorded in Volume A-2, page 91. John A. Kalbach, et al to Kalbach Lumber Company.

ENDNOTES

1. "The Story of Greater Oskaloosa" ("told by J.W. Johnson"), Midwestern; August 1910;63.
2. Hedge, M., "Iowa Pioneers"; The Oskaloosa Herald, September 8, 1904, p. 7, cols. 1-3.
3. Ibid
4. "Isaac Kalbach," The Oskaloosa Herald, September 8, 1904, p. 7, cols. 1-3.
5. Ibid
6. Walkins, H., Oskaloosa Mahaska County, Iowa - Illustrated, (Oskaloosa: The Times Company, 1896).
7. "Warren Kalbach," Oskaloosa Daily Herald, August 15, 1945, p. 4, col. 2.